

CHAPTER SEVEN

EMBATTLED LEFTISTS: LATE 1950S TO 1965

Introduction

The nationalist governments and British officials took certain measures aimed at solidifying the future of the Anglo-Nigerian relationship. This chapter discusses these measures and Marxists' reactions to them. The background to this was the Soviet Union's new perception of Africa in 1958 (and afterwards) as well as the need for Britain to show its allies (particularly the United States of America) that London was leaving no stone unturned. The Soviet Union's new approach featured economic and technical aid to newly independent African nations by way of gaining their support in world affairs.¹

Britain was, of course, concerned about the new Soviet interest in Africa, with all of its various solicitations of friendships. British officials were keenly interested in retaining the sympathy and support of newly independent states of Africa and preventing them

1. CAB134/1355: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: NATO Report on Communist Penetration in Africa - Note by the Foreign Office, May 27, 1959, p 2; CAB134/1355: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Soviet Bloc Economic Offensive in Africa -Note by the Foreign Office, October 26, 1959, PRO, London.

from being subverted by Soviet influence.² It thus pursued policies aimed at sustaining the Western position in the new emerging nations in Africa, Asia, and the West Indies. While the exodus of British personnel from Nigeria on the eve of 1960 was of much concern, efforts were geared towards preserving the special relationship between ruling nationalists and colonial officials through drafting of a Technical Co-operation Scheme and a Defence Agreement, ensuring the maintenance of economic links, and promoting Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth and its adherence to a non-neutralist foreign policy after independence. These measures were, of course, opposed by the leftist groups because they perceived it as the prelude to underdevelopment and the continuous influence of the colonial power. Stalling the incorporation of Nigeria into the international capitalist system remained the main goal of Marxist groups during this period.³

2. FO371/137972: Foreign Office Memorandum - Africa: The Next Ten Years, November 23, 1959. See DJ Morgan, *The Official History of Colonial Development, Volume Three*, pp 211-266.

3. See Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere (eds.) *Nigeria and the International Capitalist System* (Boulder: Rienner Publication, 1989). Understanding official mind is better documented in Ronald Hyam and William R. Louis (eds.) *The conservative government and the end of empire, 1957-1964: Parts 1 and 2* (London: HMSO-London, 2000). Frank Heinlein, *British government policy and decolonisation, 1945-1963: Scrutinising the official mind* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

In 1959, various initiatives were on the table: the Cabinet African (Official) Committee's "Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies," the Foreign Office's "Africa: The Next Ten Years," and NATO's "Report on Communist Penetration in Africa."⁴ The Committee met on January 6, 1959 to consider the CO memorandum about "Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies." Agreeing that constitutional development in Nigeria had prepared it for independence within the Commonwealth, they also happily noted that, "all the governments in Nigeria have publicly condemned international communism as a threat to their own freedom."⁵

At another meeting the Committee noted that, "None of the leaders of the majority parties have sympathy with communism and none of them, except perhaps in his heart of hearts Dr. N. Azikiwe, advocates a purely 'neutralist' policy."⁶ The assurance of a non-neutralist policy in world affairs and membership of the Sterling Area and the

4. For a background discussion of the period, see DJ Morgan, *The Official History: Volume Three*, pp 84-91.

5. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Future Constitutional Development in the Colonies - East and West Africa: Notes by the Secretaries, January 6, 1959, p 3.

6. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Prospects for the African Territories for which the Colonial Office is Responsible - Memorandum by the Colonial Office, January 1959, paragraph 24. Azikiwe later became the first President of independent Nigerian nation. He was the founder and leader of the NCNC and the West African Pilot.

Commonwealth were to be complemented by a Technical Co-operation Scheme and a Defence Agreement. The essence of all these was to deny the USSR any advantage in post-independence Nigeria.

Background to Non-Neutrality

In 1959, British officials were concerned about Nigeria's future role as an ally.⁷ Colonial officials maintained that so long as Balewa and his peers remained at the helm of Nigerian affairs there was nothing about which to worry. They were satisfied with the outcome of the December 1959 general elections, which gave the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) a slight majority in the parliament thereby making it a senior partner in the coalition with the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC).

Earlier in March, Northern self-government had been granted, the Eastern and Western regions having been self-governing since 1957. Balewa's success in the December 12, 1959 general elections seems to have increased the confidence of British officials.⁸ They noted that Balewa

7. Ibid, paragraph 25-27.

8. Ibid. Ojedokun, O. "The Anglo-Nigerian Entente and its Demise, 1960-1962," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, Volume ix, Number 3, November 1971, pp 210-233. Balewa was a deputy leader of the NPC and a strong believer in anti-leftist policy. He emerged as the leader of government business and later prime minister of Nigeria on October 1, 1960.

had displayed remarkable wisdom and statesmanship in his capacity as a Minister, Leader of Government Business, and later as Prime Minister.⁹

The policy of non-neutrality was predicated upon Nigeria's alignment with the Western powers in world affairs. Britain could not allow Nigeria to become non-aligned in world politics because true non-alignment was precluded by its strategic location, size and potential. The Cabinet Committee concluded at one of its meetings that "Neutralist policies were not at present in favour in Nigeria; instead there was a strong pro-Commonwealth and anti-Communist feeling and it was unlikely that a substantial change in this outlook would occur, provided that the policies of the West were not such as to be completely un-acceptable to Nigerian opinion."¹⁰

While the British had some reservations about Azikiwe,¹¹ they were confident about the support and

9. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Prospects for the African Territories, paragraph 27.

10. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Minutes of Meeting - The Next Ten Years in Africa - West Africa, January 21, 1959, p 5.

11. Their reservation might have been informed by Azikiwe's support of a "neutralist" foreign policy in 1959. See *Daily Times*, August 22, 1959; for details about foreign policy and the 1959 election campaign, see, CS Phillips, *The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy* (Evanston, 1964), pp 14-24; KWJ Post, *The Nigeria Federal Election of 1959*, p 311.

solidarity of other leading nationalists. These men included regional premiers, ministers and senior party-men who were committed to the prevention of communist infiltration.

Part of the enthusiasm for non-neutrality as part of Nigeria's post-independence foreign policy was the result of NATO's Report of 1959, which suggested that, where relevant, NATO members should ensure the support of their old colonies against the Eastern bloc.¹² It, however, added that "it would be counter-productive to attempt to prevent Soviet contacts by force; it would be better to convince the Africans that the new colonialist was the U.S.S.R. and let them experience the fact at first hand".¹³ Furthermore, Britain recognised the fact that economic, commercial, cultural and emotional bonds with its old colonies were to remain intact. An editorial in *The Times* (London) summed up the situation as "a game of diplomatic *ju-jitsu*, which the contestant using the least force will win."¹⁴

12. CAB134/1355: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: NATO Report, p 2.

13. *Ibid.*

14. Quoted from CAB134/1354: The Political Scene in Tropical Africa, November 1958, PRO, London.

Balewa, the Marxists and Non-neutralist Policy

The Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was more emphatic about non-neutrality policy on foreign affairs than any other politician was in the 1960s. He was the champion of non-neutrality in Anglophone Africa. In his reported conversation with Kwame Nkrumah in February 1959, Balewa emphatically voiced his admiration of the West and the need for non-neutrality among Africans as a way of consolidating long-term and beneficial ties with Britain (and perhaps the United States).¹⁵ He pledged mutual support in the defence field with the United Kingdom, and was unequivocal about adoption of a neutralist line in foreign affairs.¹⁶ As he reported, "I told him categorically that we were going to stand by the West and that we could be full partners in the British Commonwealth of Nations, that we disliked neutrality and did not believe in it."¹⁷

While Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth could be seen as a *fait accompli*, the government took steps toward delaying the opening of a Russian Embassy in

15. Ibid. Also, O Aluko, *Ghana and Nigeria 1957 - 1970: A Study in Inter-African Discord*, (London, 1976).

16. CAB134/1354: The Political Scene in Tropical Africa, p 4.

17. Ibid, p 2.

Nigeria.¹⁸ The politics of delaying the opening of the USSR's Embassy in Nigeria began in January 1960, when the Foreign Office outlined strict measures that should be followed before permission would be granted to any country wishing to open an embassy in Nigeria.¹⁹ Subsequently accreditation and opening of an embassy was based upon a Foreign Office memorandum. This, perhaps, was responsible for the USSR's late application for opening an embassy, which was only made after October 1960 in the hope that the new regime would grant permission more easily.

They were wrong. Balewa sought the advice of the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs about the steps to be taken. As he wrote, "the Russians were being insistent about opening an embassy, and I put them off by saying that it was a question of applying in the usual way."²⁰ Balewa had taken the line that applications would be dealt with in the following order of priority: Commonwealth countries; countries already having

18. FO371/146827: Problems Involved in Establishing and Maintaining Diplomatic Relations with Soviet Union, January 12, 1960.

19. Ibid.

20. FO371/146832: Meeting of the Prime Minister of Nigeria with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs and the Colonial Secretary at the Foreign Office, November 29, 1960.

offices in Lagos; and new applications according to their merits.²¹

In a conversation with Balewa, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs noted that the government had taken the necessary steps to stall the USSR's application.²² This explains why the USSR had no embassy in Nigeria until 1961. The British Embassy, on the other hand, represented Nigeria in the USSR until 1962 when it opened its first mission in Moscow (the first in the Eastern bloc).

On the eve of independence, Sir James Robertson relinquished the offices of internal affairs, police, finance and economic development to Balewa and his ministers. Subsequently, the office of the Governor-General was given to Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. As part of the training process, Robertson had allowed Balewa to read foreign and diplomatic papers, as well as those on

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

defence.²³ According to Robertson, this prepared Balewa for the task of handling foreign and defence matters.²⁴

Adequate machinery and personnel were also set up at the External Affairs Department in Lagos and Nigeria's office at the United Nations in New York. The administrators at both offices had been trained in the United Kingdom and the United States as well as in other British Embassies. They were men for whom senior officials could vouch when it came to security and the continuity of non-neutralist policy in foreign affairs.

Beginning in 1957, Reginald Barrett, a Briton in charge of the Nigerian Liaison Office in Washington, was asked to train six mid-career Nigerians who later became Assistant Secretaries in the External Affairs Department on completion of their training. About forty in all were selected to undergo training in Washington and other British embassies. They were tutored in international relations, protocol, and diplomatic procedures, by British and U.S. officials in New York and Washington D.C. These

23. DO 35/10489, "Letter from Sir J Robertson to Sir H Poynton on Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa," Minute by BJ Greenhill, February 19, 1960, PRO; For details about the special relationship between Balewa and Robertson see, Sir James Robertson, *Transition in Africa: From Direct Rule to Independence - A Memoir* (London, 1974).

24. Sir James Robertson, "Sovereign Nigeria," *African Affairs*, vol.59, no.239, April 1961, pp 145-154. Also, his *Transition in Africa: From Direct Rule to Independence - A Memoir* (London, 1974).

men also offered a course on "Issues in International Relations" at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies.²⁵

One of the most important figures in the External Affairs Department during this period was L.O.V. Anionwu, who first acted as a liaison officer for Balewa's government in London. In his recommendation on July 4, 1960, the Director of the Imperial Defence College, London, Sir Robert Scott, suggested to the Foreign Office that Anionwu would be a reliable candidate for the position of a Permanent Under-Secretary of Defence and External Affairs in independent Nigeria. Anionwu had taken a series of courses on diplomacy, protocol, and international politics, and had imbibed the spirit of the international capitalist system while in the Imperial Defence College. Sir Robert Scott remarked that Anionwu was "... Very friendly ... African department could, I am sure, speak to him with complete freedom about Foreign

25. V McKay, *Africa in World Politics* (2nd Edition, Westport, 1974), pp 399-400. Anthony Kirk-Greene identified three people who later occupied eminent positions in the Ministry of External and Commonwealth Affairs after independence. Isa Wali, G.H. Dove-Edwin and E.O. Sanu. See his *"Diplomacy and Diplomats: The Formation of Foreign Service Cadres in Black Africa,"* K Ingham, (ed.) *Foreign Relations of African States*, p 298.

Office thinking on Nigeria ... it would be a very good investment and well worth the trouble."²⁶

It was not surprising therefore, that Anionwu became an adviser and Under-Secretary to Balewa on Defence and Foreign Affairs on the eve of independence. On the other hand, both Ifeagwu and Aig-Imoukhuede were posted to the Nigerian Permanent Mission in the United Nations in 1959 to study western diplomatic protocol. Ifeagwu had earlier served with the U.K. Consulate General in Washington for three years, before being appointed to the United Nations. Aig-Imoukhuede had worked at both the Nigerian *Daily Times* and *Sunday Times* between 1955 and 1957. Between 1957 and 1958, he was the editor of *Federal Nigeria*, a publication of the Ministry of Research and Information. His success there, as the government's image maker was perhaps responsible for his being recommended for the United Nations job by Kola Balogun, the Minister for Research and Information.

Suffice it to say then that the Nigerian Foreign Service was built upon pro-Western ideological premises. The Robertson/Balewa government was careful in its appointment and secondment of personnel to the nascent

26. FO371/146831: Sir Robert Scott to Foreign Office, July 4, 1960.

External Affairs Department. In fact, appointments or secondment into the External Affairs Department (later Ministry of External and Commonwealth Affairs) since the 1950s were based upon the ideological orientation of the individuals. This became glaring from 1957 onwards, when non-career diplomats were seconded from the civil service to the External Affairs Department.

It should not be surprising therefore, that men like Nwokedi, Simeon Adebo, N.A. Martins, Anionwu, Osakwe, Ogbu, G.M. Garba and Iyalla (all civil servants); and Mohammadu Ngileruma, Baba Gana, Abdul Maliki, J.T. Yesufu, Bello Malabu, Ignatius Durlong and Sanni Kontagora (all party stalwarts), were appointed into various positions in the Foreign Service. These were the men who executed Balewa's non-neutralist policies.

Marxists and the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact

One of the ways by which Britain satisfied its commitments to the Western bloc was the consummation and realisation of a defence pact with its former colonies. In the case of Nigeria (as in other parts of the empire), the idea of a defence pact did not just emerge in 1958. If viewed from a Cold War perspective, as it should be, the

idea was aimed at consolidating the gains of the Western powers generally in defence and strategy against the Soviet-led Eastern bloc. It should not be surprising therefore that the Soviet Union was the first to criticise the idea on the floor of the United Nations when it was first signed with Ceylon in 1947.

Apart from winning hearts and souls, defence strategy was also important in Anglo-American Cold War politics. Gupta and John Kent have argued that defence strategy had been part of British Cold War tactics since 1947.²⁷ As early as 1951, senior Colonial Office officials had identified two major roles for the colonies in defence matters. And as Trafford Smith noted, colonies played their part in defence in two ways:

- (1) "By raising and maintaining forces from their local manpower. These forces have the primary role of safeguarding internal security in their territories, thereby preserving the usefulness of the territories as bases and sources of manpower, raw materials, etc; and,
- (2) By maintaining or increasing their contribution to the

27. PS Gupta, *Imperialism and the British Labour Movement, 1914-1964* (London, 1975), pp 286-290. J Kent, *British Imperial Strategy and the Origin of the Cold War, 1944 - 1949* (London, 1993).

pool of economic resources available for the Commonwealth war effort."²⁸

This view suggests, then, that the thrust of the Anglo-Nigerian defence pact was the need to sustain Britain's influence in Nigeria after independence.

As spelled out in the policy paper, "Defence Policy and Global Strategy" in March 1952, Britain's obligation was based on its role in Europe, NATO, and the Commonwealth, as well as London's desire to remain a leading power. Africa was not left out of the overall defence strategy. Lord Salisbury noted in July 1954 that, "Britain was to continue to play an eminent role in checking the spread of communism; she was to preserve security and develop stable government in colonial territories."²⁹

Two short-term steps were taken towards realising this. First was the encouragement of defence co-operation conferences with other colonial powers, South Africa and the United States. Two conferences were held in Nairobi and Dakar in August 1951 and March 1954 respectively. Second, based upon the Ministry of Defence Official

28. DEFE7/415: Memorandum by Trafford Smith, October 24, 1951.

29. CAB129/69: Cabinet Memorandum by Lord Salisbury, July 24, 1954.

Committee's recommendation on August 15, 1955, the Cabinet approved the appointment of a military adviser in East and West Africa, if administering officers and local politicians finally approved of it.³⁰

As to long-term measures, Sir Harold Parker (Permanent Secretary - Ministry of Defence, 1948-1956) noted that "We should hope that the West African territories on achieving independence would agree to undertake some external defence commitment, on the lines of the present commitment to provide a Brigade for use in a major war, as part of the obligations arising from Commonwealth membership."³¹

Officials in the colonies were directed to seek the views of local politicians as soon as the opportunity arose. In Nigeria, Britain used the opportunity of the constitutional conferences in late 1957 and 1958 to seek the views of politicians as to the desirability of a defence pact after independence. Contrary to general opinion, Nigerians were not coerced into signing the

30. See David Goldsworthy, (ed.) *British Documents on the end of empire: The Conservative Government-Part I*, pp 200-201.

31. CAB130/111: Note by Sir H. Parker, August 15, 1955.

Defence Pact with the United Kingdom in 1960.³² First, the final decision about the pact rested upon Parliament's approval and the signature of the Prime Minister after independence. This procedure was adopted after the USSR's criticism of a similar pact with Ceylon earlier in 1947.³³ Secondly, available evidence suggests that Nigerian politicians viewed it as part of the good will and cooperation between the two countries. In fact, Nigerian politicians believed that it would ensure the territorial

32. DEFE7/1484: Nigeria Defence Agreement, 1960-1961. During the riots Awolowo was reported to have said that he along with Azikiwe, Balewa and Bello were forced to initiate the agreement in 1958. Evidence now points to the contrary. See *Senate Debates* (Nigeria), March - May 1960 session: 238; *Daily Times* (Nigeria) May 11, 1960; *Nigerian Tribune*, May 4, 1960; *House of Representatives Debates* (Nigeria), November 1960, p 61; IA Gambari, *Party Politics and Foreign Policy: Nigeria Under the First Republic* (Zaria, 1980), pp 33-53.

33. After 1947 Britain took a serious view of the implications of signing defence agreements with colonies before independence. This was a result of the USSR's criticism in the United Nations of the Anglo-Ceylon Defence Agreement signed before Ceylon's independence. The idea of defence pacts was thereafter postponed until after independence as in the case of Nigeria. Margaret Vogt wrongly asserts that the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact was signed in 1958. There was only a mutual consent on the part of the parties during the resumed Constitutional Conference in 1958. See Margaret Vogt, "Nigeria's Defence Policy: An Overview," in AE Ekoko, and M Vogt, (eds.) *Nigeria Defence Policy: Issues and Problems* (Lagos, 1990), p 95. Ekoko also missed the date when he stated that the pact was signed on the eve of independence. See Ekoko, A.E. "The Principles and Practices of Alliance Formation and Nigeria's Defence," in Ekoko and Vogt (eds.) *Nigeria*. In another study with Ajayi however, they both concluded that the pact was initialled in July 1960 and formerly signed on January 5, 1961. See JFA Ajayi, and AE Ekoko, "Transfer of Power in Nigeria: Its Origins and Consequences," Prosser Gifford, and Williams R. Louis, (eds.) *Decolonization and African Independence: The Transfers of Power in Africa, 1960-1980* (New Haven, 1988), p 263.

integrity of the nascent nation and help defend her from external aggression.³⁴

Towards the end of 1958, the Prime Minister, Federal Ministers and the three Regional Premiers agreed to enter into a defence agreement with Britain after independence. Azikiwe had earlier taken the view that it would be in the interests of Nigeria and Great Britain to sign a defence agreement whereby the UK would have "full facilities to use Kano and Lagos airfields for the transport of troops and supplies in peace or war time; to use the harbours of Lagos and Port Harcourt and the communications thence with Kano."³⁵ Amongst the reasons for these was that any loss of airfield facilities at Kano would have a serious effect on Britain's ability to safeguard her interests in the

34. The British also viewed it in the same light. An official minutes that: "The greater our concern for the future security of Nigeria, the stronger is the reason for this predominantly pro-Western and friendly Government to give us what we are asking for under the Defence and stations of forces Agreement." See PREM11/3047: Nigeria - Defence Agreement Part 1, January 1960. It was reported that Awolowo even promised land in the Western Region to be used as the British base. See DEFE7/1484: Nigeria Defence Agreement ... *op.cit*; Moreover, the first Nigerian Minister of Defence, Alhaji Muhammadu Ribadu viewed it as a "reaffirmation of the friendly and cordial ties which already exist and are known to exist between Nigeria and the United Kingdom." See *House of Representatives Debates* (Nigeria) November 1959, p 56.

35. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Prospects for the African Territories - Memorandum by the Colonial Office. Also see Draft Defence Agreement between the Government of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of the Federation of Nigeria, *Sessional Paper* no.4, 1960.

Indian Ocean in the post-independence period.³⁶ In addition Nigeria could not at the time afford the huge cost of training her military personnel and the buying of military equipment.

The United Kingdom's Defence Pact with Nigeria, like those with Ceylon, Malaya and the Gold Coast, should be seen as part of a general desire to sustain Western interests in peace and war. It was, in part, a political move to prevent the subversive influence of the USSR. As the Foreign Office noted: "We have certain requirements in Africa which need to be examined... they partly derived from considerations of internal security and partly from considerations of global strategic policy."³⁷

This involved the presence in Kenya of element of Britain's strategic reserves; aircraft staging rights in Nigeria, Gambia, Sierra Leone and Kenya; and rights to over-fly territories between the staging points. In return for the use of Nigerian airfields, harbours and ports, Britain agreed to train Nigerian army and naval personnel in the United Kingdom.³⁸ While a significant proportion of

36. Ibid, paragraph 24. Also CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Office) Committee: Future Constitutional Development in Colonies, p 5.

37. FO371/137972: Africa, paragraph 5 and 20.

38. Draft Defence Agreement... Article II, no.2, 3, 4, 5 and 6.

the cost was to be paid by Nigeria, Her Majesty's Government nonetheless assisted in defraying part of it. The Nigerian Parliament passed the bill by a vote of 149 to 39 on November 19, 1960.³⁹ Official signing of the treaty between the two governments did not take place until January 5, 1961.

Nigerian youth were, however, not happy with the defence pact. It presented Marxists with an opportunity to revive their idea that the whole process of decolonisation and the transfer of power were aimed at creating a neo-colonial dependency and a fertile international capitalist system in the country.⁴⁰ As Claude Phillips noted: "From the beginning of independence, Nigeria has faced a bewildering array of internal pressures attempting to establish, alter, or repudiate the foreign policy of the country." He concluded that "the articulate challenges against the government were by no means limited to parliament." According to him, "Non-governmental groups such as political parties, labour unions, university student unions, youth groups, newspapers, and others

39. DEFE 7/1484: Nigeria Defence Agreement 1960-1961. Also, GJ Idang, "The Politics of Nigerian Foreign Policy: The Ratification and Renunciation of the Anglo-Nigerian Defence Agreement," *African Studies Review*, vol.xviii, no.2, September 1970, p 230.

⁴⁰ This is discussed further on pages 258-274 in this chapter.

joined the radical politicians in condemning Government actions and policies."⁴¹

Under the leadership of a Soviet trained pharmacist, Tunji Otegbeye, the Nigerian Youth Congress, the Zikist National Vanguard, and the National University Students' Union staged several protests in Lagos and other parts of the country.⁴² They identified five obnoxious aspects of the pact. These were

- "If a British soldier kills a Nigerian he cannot be tried in the courts of Nigeria, but can be acquitted on the strength of a mere exonerating statement by a British superior;
- The British soldiers have an unlimited right to carry guns wherever they go in Nigeria. Yet no Nigerian can carry arms without permission from the Governor-General;
- Nigeria guarantees to the British soldiers full exemption from passport and visa formalities;
- The British soldiers are entitled to complete fiscal immunities, full exemption from exchange regulations, and absolute freedom from customs duties and inspection at ports of entry; and,

41. CS Phillips, *The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy*, p 86.

42. Ibid, p. 72-77. GJ Idang, *Nigeria: Internal Politics and Foreign Policy*, pp 82-84.

- All vehicles of the British servicemen are exempted from all licensing and insurance regulations."⁴³

Because of the many serious disturbances that followed, Balewa's government had no option other than to abrogate the defence pact in January 1962. Nigerian military personnel, however, continued to receive training in the United Kingdom despite the abrogation.

Marxists and other Imperial Preferences

Linking the economy with the Sterling Area⁴⁴ and Nigerian membership in the Commonwealth were significant parts of the anti-leftist decolonising policies pursued by British officials and the Balewa government before independence. The colonial economy, unsurprisingly, was closely linked with Britain and the Sterling Area. It was

43. *West African Pilot*, December 3, 1960; E Babatope, *Student Power in Nigeria, 1960 - 1970: A Documentary Sourcebook of Student Militancy in Nigeria, Volume 1* (Yaba, 1974), p 13; R Nassal, "Die Anfänge der Kommunistischen Partei in Nigeria," *Internationales Afrika Forum*, 1, 4, April 1965, pp 25-29, is a detailed account of the Nigerian communists' role during the anti Anglo-Nigerian Defence Pact crisis after independence. I want to thank Monsieur Rufus Folaranmi, a teacher, translator and interpreter, of Strasbourg, France, for reading the article to me in the English language.

44. This is well analysed by AE Hinds, "Sterling and imperial Policy, 1945-1951," *JICH*, Volume xv, no.2, January 1987, pp 148-169; "Imperial Policy and Colonial Sterling Balances, 1943-56," *JICH*, Volume xix, no.1, January 1991, pp 24-44. As it relates to Europe is analysed by S Newton, "Britain, the Sterling Area and European Integration, 1945-1950," *JICH*, Volume xiii, no.3, May 1985, pp 163-182.

principally based on the production and export of primary produce, the price of which depended on world trade. There was an increase in the volume of exports of primary produce from Nigeria to Western countries, particularly Britain, during the period. Whether or not this led to development or under-development is another debate.⁴⁵ What is of interest here is that the economy was linked with the Sterling Area as part of the efforts towards cementing a financial relationship between Britain and her colonies.⁴⁶

In official circles, preference for the Sterling Area was linked with the future of the Commonwealth.⁴⁷ As early as 1953, Sir Norman Brook, Secretary to the Cabinet (1947-1962), wrote a memorandum, which later became a Cabinet paper: "The Future of Commonwealth Membership." Brook argued that, Britain should aim to keep colonies which could expect independence in the next ten or twenty years, solidly in the Commonwealth after independence. His

45. T Falola, (ed.) *Britain and Nigeria: Development or Under-Development?* G Williams, "Nigeria: A Political Economy," G Williams, (ed.) *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London, 1976), pp 1-54; and, Lawal, A.O. "British Commercial Interests and the Decolonization process in Nigeria, 1950 – 1960," *African Economic History*, 22, 1994, pp 93-110.

46. DJ Morgan, *The Official History - Volume Three*, pp 157-182.

47. *Ibid.*

argument was that through this Britain would maintain the political cohesion of the Sterling Area.⁴⁸ This idea was supported by most senior colonial officials, particularly Sir Hilton Poynton (Deputy Under-Secretary of State, 1948–August 1959). He stressed that Britain should strengthen moves towards the political cohesion of the Sterling Area and the Commonwealth.⁴⁹ He raised three questions and provided answers to them. These were (1) "Will the territories in category [a] be willing to remain in the Sterling Area when independent? (2) Could their continued membership of the Sterling Area be made a condition of their membership of the Commonwealth? and (3) Would their continued membership of the Sterling Area, whether within or without the Commonwealth, be a source of strength?"⁵⁰

As to question one, Poynton noted that much depended upon the success of the Sterling Area in international trade. "Decisions," according to Poynton, "will be taken on their own judgment of self-interest, though one naturally hopes that judgment will lead them to remain

48. CO967/203: Imperial Preference and the Sterling Area: Minutes by Sir H. Poynton, November 26, 1953.

49. *Ibid.*

50. D Goldsworthy, (ed.) *British Documents on the end of empire: The Conservative Government- Part III*, p 68.

within the Sterling Area."⁵¹ In his answer to the second question he argued that, "we could not make continued membership of the Sterling Area a condition of full membership of the Commonwealth, partly because Canada is already outside the Sterling Area but inside the Commonwealth."⁵² He concluded that "the crucial point is really not membership of the Commonwealth but membership of the Sterling Area."⁵³

This was, perhaps, why the Cabinet Africa Official Committee in its meeting in January 1959 concluded that: "The Sterling area would suffer a moderate loss of dollar exchange if Nigeria were to leave it; departure from the Commonwealth, without leaving the Sterling area, would have little or no effect on the latter."⁵⁴ Officials, however, were confident that Nigeria would remain in the Commonwealth after independence. Their assurance was based on Nigerian politicians' preference for membership of the Commonwealth, which they believed would strengthen their

51. CO967/203: Minutes by Sir H. Poynton; Also, Goldsworthy, *The Conservative Government*, pp 68-69.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Future Constitutional Development, paragraph 28 (6).

relationship with the United Kingdom.⁵⁵ Much, however, depended upon whether or not ex-masters and ex-servants remained always as friends.

A key factor in the future relationship between Nigeria and the United Kingdom was the extent of the latter's economic aid for development after independence.⁵⁶ In 1959 for instance, the Foreign Office stated that Russia's tactics in Africa had changed considerably. There was now more Soviet economic aid to newly independent African states, such as Guinea, Ghana and Egypt. As the FO memorandum stated, "their technique is at present to represent themselves as an alternative source of economic and technical help."⁵⁷

The Cabinet Africa (Official) Committee deliberated upon the FO's memorandum on January 21, 1959. As it relates to Nigeria, members concluded that "It would be of the highest value if, in agreement with Nigerian leaders, arrangements could be made before independence for the introduction at that time of a technical co-operation

55. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Prospects for the African Territories - Memorandum by the Colonial Office, paragraph 31.

56. DJ Morgan, *The Official History, Volume Three*, pp 211-232.

57. FO371/137972: Africa: The Next Ten Years: 20; See, Morgan, *The Official History... Volume Three*, pp 236-266.

scheme similar in form, but larger in size, than that which had been introduced for Ghana."⁵⁸ The Committee suggested that the CO should circulate a memorandum discussing the means of encouraging economic development in Nigeria, with a view to the possible formulation of a technical co-operation scheme.⁵⁹

The Cabinet Africa (Official) Committee met on February 20, 1959, to discuss the CO memorandum on technical co-operation scheme for Nigeria. At the meeting, C.G. Eastwood (Assistant Under-Secretary of State, 1955-1965) presented the CO memorandum that set out the possible lines on which a scheme of technical co-operation with post-independence Nigeria might be developed.⁶⁰ The memorandum proposed a bilateral scheme (which was heavily weighted towards UK assistance at the outset) rather than an international or Commonwealth multilateral plan.⁶¹

The Colonial Office was of the view that "the scheme would need to be on a generous scale so that our effort compared reasonably favourably with those of other

58. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Minutes of Meeting -The Next Ten Years in Africa: West Africa, January 21, 1959, p 5.

59. Ibid, p 6.

60. CAB134/1353: Cabinet - Africa (Official) Committee: Technical Co-operation Scheme for Nigeria, February 20, 1959, p 1.

countries..."⁶² The Cabinet Committee concluded that the United Kingdom was bound to make a contribution to Nigerian development, and that the need for a technical assistance scheme should be acceptable in principle.⁶³ The Treasury was, however, asked to determine how much could be used in this way.⁶⁴ Like the Defence Agreement, Nigerian leaders accepted the offer of a Technical Co-operation Scheme after independence. This was the genesis of Nigeria/UK bilateral co-operation in education, agriculture, science and technology after independence.

By late 1959 one can arguably say that Britain, with the assistance of leading politicians, had shaped the world outlook of most Nigerians towards the West. No doubt the ideological orientation of the Nigerian ruling elite was pro-Western: the principle of "free enterprise" and "perpetuation of capitalist economy" were dominant perceptions in Nigerian economic and developmental programmes. A "nurtured-capitalism" had been established. What remained was its consolidation

61. Ibid, p 1.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid, p 2.

64. Ibid.

after independence.⁶⁵ Upon successful completion of the general elections of December 1959, the Secretary of State for the Colonies introduced the Nigerian Independence Bill to the House of Commons that was unanimously passed. At this point in late 1959 and early 1960, the British could not afford to risk what they had striven hard to build - the confidence and respect of Nigerian politicians - by refusing or delaying independence. On October 1, 1960, power was eventually transferred to Nigerian politicians with the hope that Britain and Nigeria would remain as allies.

Marxists and the New Nation

In late 1960 a group of returning Soviet-trained Nigerians and ex-Zikists formed the Nigerian Youth Congress. The Congress, as could be expected, was guided by Marxist ideology and did not hide its admiration for Soviets' reorientation of its African policy. The change from a Stalinist view of Marxist-Leninist transition in Africa to Premier Khrushchev's understanding of the nationalist stage as a natural stage in the transition

65. SP Schatz, *Nigerian Capitalism* (Berkeley/London, 1977); P Kirby, *Industrialization in an Open Economy: Nigeria 1945-1966* (Cambridge, 1969); J O'Connell, "The Political Class and Economic Growth," *Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies*, Volume 8, March 1966.

to a socialist revolution was important in the overall success of the Marxist vanguards in Nigeria. The NYC and its allied Zikist National Vanguard were opposed to Anglo-American influence in Nigeria and the pro-Western foreign policy of the Balewa administration. The domestic policy of the government was also criticised from time to time as being tailored to benefit the rich rather than the masses.

The Marxists, however, made some progress through article publications in pro-Western newspapers and the various government controlled press and communication media. It was through the press that the Marxists were able to call on Balewa's government to stop the witch-hunting of Marxists and other radical groups. It was not surprising therefore that the Marxists implored the government to change its domestic policy of non-employment of Eastern-bloc trained Nigerians in the public sector. The government was also asked to lift the ban on the importation of Communist literature because it was a negation of the right of the Nigerian citizens to get information on any subject or topic of interest.⁶⁶

66. *West African Pilot*, "Lift ban on Communist literature," October 20, 1960.

Members of the NYC and ZNV were also opposed to Western interference in independent African nations' domestic situation as in the Lumumba case. In February 15, 1961, the Marxists under the leadership of a Soviet-trained medical practitioner, Tunji Otegbeye, organised a riot in response to the assassination of Patrice Lumumba and the Anglo-Nigerian defense pact.⁶⁷ Although the government quickly quelled the riot and arrested its organizers, Marxist groups seem to have made progress in making themselves relevant in the new nation's politics.⁶⁸

It seems that the Balewa government was conscious of the situation and the trend in Marxian organisation. The government responded by convening the All-Nigeria People's Conference in August 1961. The idea, it seems, was not "merely a means of allowing the radicals to let off steam," as Phillips would have us believe.⁶⁹ It was a genuine response on the part of the government to address sensitive issues that affected the new nation. The opportunity created was historic, because for the

⁶⁷ *Daily Express*, October 28, 1961.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹ CS Phillips, *The Development of Nigerian Foreign Policy* (London, 1964), p 61.

first time leftist groups were able to air their views without intimidation and repression.

A lot of noise was made by the leftists regarding Nigeria's foreign policy. The International Relations Committee under Aminu Kano concluded that government policy was pro-West and anti-Soviet. It made four recommendations as follow:

- a. "The government should desist from communist witch-hunting";
- b. "The Soviet should be given accommodations equal to that any nation";
- c. "The Soviet Union should have equal facilities as other diplomatic missions";
- d. "Mr. Khrushchev should be invited to visit Nigeria."⁷⁰

These views were not surprising to the government because it had been one of the publicly debated issues between the government and the leftist groups. Possibly, one of the effects of these recommendations was that the government allowed the opening of a Soviet Union Embassy in Lagos, although with some restrictions.

⁷⁰ Records of All-Nigeria People's Conference, August 19-12, 1961, (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1961).

In late 1961, Chukwudolue Orhakamalu and Obong Udoeka announced the formation of a Communist Party of Nigeria in Kano. The choice of "holy" Kano is surprising because leftist groups had always operated in the southern part of Nigeria. The group was not seen as a threat, and the government's attitude was to downplay its existence. In fact, between late 1961 and early 1964, the group made no significant impact on politics and development in Nigeria. But the Federal election of 1964 soon changed its silent attitude. An advertisement was placed in the *West African Pilot* sponsored by the Communist Party of Nigeria calling for an "Operation Mobilisation."⁷¹

"Operation Mobilisation" was an attempt by CPN leadership to recruit members among the populace and, more importantly, to enjoin them to participate during the forthcoming elections. To Chukwudolue Orhakamalu (president) and Obong Udoeka Esiet (general secretary), the goal was to beat the right-wing politicians in popularity and draw more sympathy from the population. Mobilising the masses was seen as the first effort to attaining power. The CPN also hoped to field candidates

⁷¹ *West African Pilot*, September 26, 1964, p 1090.

and contest for various positions during the election of 1964. As events showed, the efforts were unsuccessful.

Instead, another leftist organisation under the leadership of Dr. Tunji Otegbeye contested the election of 1964 using the name Socialist Workers and Farmers Party of Nigeria (SWFPN). Formed in 1963, it registered as a political party in 1964 to contest the upcoming Federal elections. The SWFPN was more successful than any previous attempts at nationwide leftist organisations in Nigeria. The strategy was to affiliate with the Nigerian Trade Union Congress (NTUC), which was sponsored by the Moscow-funded World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU). Through NTUC, funds were sent to SWFPN to carry out its activities in Nigeria.⁷²

Both Otegbeye and Wahab Goodluck enjoyed the confidence of the Soviet Union and Communist International between 1963 and 1966. The idea of scientific socialism was the basis of SWFPN campaign during the elections of 1964. The Soviet Union donated a sum of £75,000 towards SWFPN campaign and other activities during this period. While the party did not succeed in making any impact on the electorate because

⁷² *The Report of the Tribunal of Inquiry into the Activities of the Trade Union, Lagos, 1977, p 41.*

of its poor performance during the elections, it did have an impact in other areas. Working closely with the NTUC, SWFPN used fund from the Soviet Union to establish Eko Printers and the Socialist Publishing House. Through these institutions, a newspaper called "Advance" was published with the aim of disseminating the ideas of scientific socialism in Nigeria.

Otegbeye seems to have benefited more because the Soviet fund was used to set up Ireti Clinic and Tutu "Kemists". Thus, he was able to practice medicine since he could not find employment in government hospitals. The clinic and pharmacy were seen as a leftist gesture to Otegbeye and his cohorts for their efforts. As it could be expected, the beneficiaries of leftist organisations' goodwill (such as scholarships or donations) were kin and kindred of SWAFP leadership. Dedicated members of the NTUC and SWFPN also benefited by being appointed into office to compensate for their efforts. Wahab Goodluck, Kunle Oyero, and Eskor Toyo were appointed as directors of the West African Engineering and Automobile Company (WAATECO) and the

Patrice Lumumba Academy of Labour and Political Science respectively.⁷³

While preventing Marxists from participating in the administration of Nigeria during the 1960s, the government was challenged and criticised for not getting aid from non-capitalist nations in order to meet the requirements of the First National Development Plan (1962-1968). In 1961, two key federal ministers, Zana Dipcharima (Commerce and Industry) and Waziri Ibrahim (Health, and later Economic Development) remarked that it was stupendous and foolish not to seek aid from the Soviet bloc in view of the inability of the West to satisfy Nigeria's aid and assistance for the first six-year plan. By 1964, the Western region Governor, Odeleye Fadahunsi, not only received Soviet Union's delegation, but remarked that "any assistance that the a Soviet Union could render towards the implementation of Nigeria's Six-Year development Plan would be appreciated by the Federal Government."⁷⁴

Dipcharima and Waziri's comments no doubt influenced the inclusion of Moscow on the itinerary of

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ *West African Pilot*, February 7, 1964.

the first Nigerian economic mission to Europe in May 1961. The goal was to seek economic and technical assistance favourable to Nigeria. As it relates to the Soviet Union, this meant economic and developmental goals were distinguished from the implications of ideology or Cold War politics. Moreover, the Nigerian leadership was interested in opening up technological cooperation without ideological indoctrination during the visit. Although not much was achieved during the 1961 visit led by Festus Okotie-Eboh (Finance Minister), the government continued its pragmatic approach towards the Soviet Union.

Much was, however, achieved between 1962 and early 1966, when it seems that the Nigerian government had removed some barriers to relations with the Soviet Union. In August 1962 for instance, Dipcharima told newspaper reporters that, the "Federal Government had been progressively dismantling whatever barriers that existed in the flow of trade between Nigeria and the Communist bloc."⁷⁵ This statement was perhaps influential in the Eastern bloc participation during the Lagos International Trade Fair in September of 1962. The

⁷⁵ *Africa Diary*, September 1-7, 1962, p 735; *Africa Diary*, November 3-9, 1962.

Soviet bloc was not only given a good reception by the president, Nnamdi Azikiwe, the fair boosted trade with Nigeria thereafter. By June 1963, both Nigeria and the Soviet Union had signed a bilateral agreement for trade and exchange in cocoa, timber, tin and columbite, rubber, textiles, cement, chemical products and automobiles. Although the percentage of trade with the Soviet bloc remained low, the continuous interest and visitation from both sides increased between 1963 and 1966.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter has highlighted the transition between the colonial power and the Nigerian intelligentsia that assumed power in 1960, with particular attention to the continuity of anti-leftist policies and the internationalisation of Nigeria into the capitalist system. Leftist groups were unsuccessful in efforts to gain control of the political economy after independence largely because British policies had well equipped the indigenous ruling elite with anti-leftist tactics. While pragmatism was the key to dealing with external leftist influences from the Soviet bloc, a "McCarthyian" strategy was adopted against leftists

"within." As the next chapter will show, this explains the success of the ruling pro-West nationalist and labour leaders and the failure of leftist groups in Nigeria.